

Budget woes showing on Montgomery roads

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Montgomery County drivers should brace for bumpier streets and more potholes, as fewer local dollars will be devoted to area roads and state highway maintenance funds have disappeared.

The Montgomery County Department of Transportation's budget was slashed 21 percent this year, amounting to millions of dollars less for road maintenance and repairs.

In the county's transportation department, just 50 capital improvement projects were finished within three months of planned completion dates last fiscal year -- roughly half that of the year before -- budget documents show.

The county is spending \$2 million less on resurfacing, \$750,000 less on patch work, and hundreds of thousands less on traffic signal upgrades.

"It's a giant concern," said Councilman Marc Elrich, D-At large. "I certainly don't see it getting better anytime soon. The money just isn't there."

Of the county's roughly 950 miles of primary highway lanes, half are rated fair or better -- the equivalent of scoring 65 out of 100 on the county's report card for pavement quality. Just 37 percent of the county's residential roads meet that designation.

Transportation officials will survey the roads in coming months, and some officials expect the ratings to drop even further.

"There are a lot of factors that weigh into road deterioration, not the least of which will be this past winter," said Keith Compton, chief of highway services at the county's transportation department. "But if you look at it statewide, we're par for the course."

Localities across Maryland certainly are feeling the pinch as well.

Thanks to the state's budget shortfall, local governments will share just 8.5 percent of Maryland's highway user revenue this fiscal year. The counties will split \$8 million, around a quarter of the total prior to last fiscal year. Municipalities received just \$1.6 million from the state this year.

"I think it's all relative," said Councilwoman Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring. "We did benefit from a lot of [federal money] if you look at funding that came from the stimulus. But there are a lot of concerns about maintenance work and other road repairs, especially with the major snow storms."

The Maryland State Highway Administration maintains all Montgomery roads with route numbers, such as Georgia Avenue, Connecticut Avenue and Rockville Pike. Municipalities are responsible for roads within city limits.